

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 407 756

EC 305 435

AUTHOR Axelrod, Lee H.; Zvi, Jennifer C.
TITLE The Ability of College Students To Effectively Communicate the Specific Nature of Their Own Learning Disability.
PUB DATE Feb 97
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Learning Disabilities Association of America International Conference (Chicago, IL, February 19-22, 1997).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Advocacy; *Clinical Diagnosis; Cognitive Processes; College Students; Communication Skills; *Disability Identification; *Individualized Education Programs; *Learning Disabilities; Self Advocacy; Self Concept; *Self Evaluation (Individuals)

ABSTRACT

Thirty-three college students with learning disabilities responded to a request to identify their learning disability. The responses were then coded and a summary of the professional diagnoses of the learning disabilities was added to the students' self-descriptions. Five authorities in the field of learning disabilities were asked to use a five-point rating scale to determine how well the descriptions agreed. Only one-third of the college students were able to describe their own learning disability so that it agreed with the summary of the professional diagnosis. Recentness of diagnosis, age, and IQ were found to be unrelated to the agreement. Only grade point average was positively associated with the ability for self-description. The study indicates that high school individualized education program (IEP) information was the most difficult for students to repeat, compared to university, community college, or private practice psychologists' diagnoses. Less than half of the professional diagnoses included both processing and achievement information in summary statements; however, this is the information that the students commonly use when articulating the nature of their disability. (CR)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

Lee H. Axelrod and Jennifer C. Zvi
California State University, Northridge
18111 Nordhoff Street
Northridge, CA 91330-8264

Learning Disabilities Association of America
International Conference - Chicago, Illinois
Poster Session #1 - February 20, 1997

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

Minor changes have been made to
improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this
document do not necessarily represent
official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

L. H. Axelrod

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

THE ABILITY OF COLLEGE STUDENTS TO EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE THE SPECIFIC NATURE OF THEIR OWN LEARNING DISABILITY

School age students with learning disabilities have traditionally relied on parents and teachers to champion for them but, as they move to the post secondary level, the emphasis shifts to self-advocacy. Transition planning for students leaving high school should include both understanding and communicating their own learning disability (Ryan 1996). However, some high school students are just beginning to become familiar with the terms used in their reports (Durlak, Rose & Bursuck 1994). Few students with learning disabilities have the opportunity to engage in training programs to aid in understanding their own strengths and weaknesses such as that proposed by Durlack, Rose & Bursuck (1994) for high school students and that of Roffman, Herzog & Wershba-Gershon (1994) for college students.

Even though college students need to describe their learning disability in plain language, diagnostic reports often contain technical or vague terminology (Brinckerhoff 1993). In order for self-advocacy to be successful, college students must understand the nature of their disability so they can articulate their needs for accommodations (McGuire, Madaus, Litt, & Ramirez 1996). Looking ahead, if youth with learning disabilities are to take advantage of the Americans With Disabilities Act, they must be responsible for appropriately disclosing their needs to employers (Satcher 1994).

Procedure

Students, identified as learning disabled, consulting college Learning Disabilities Specialists at a large western state university on two consecutive school days were asked to write a response to the question, "What Is Your Learning Disability?". Thirty-three students responded. After each student's name was replaced with a code number, the

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

summary of the professional diagnosis of learning disability was added to their self description.. A Five Point Rating Scale was developed to rate the agreement of the student's description with that of the professional. Five authorities in the field of learning disabilities were asked to use the rating scale to determine how well the descriptions agreed.

RATING SCALE

**COMPARISON OF STUDENT'S AND PROFESSIONAL'S
WRITTEN DESCRIPTION OF STUDENT'S LEARNING DISABILITY**

5 point rating scale with 5 being perfect agreement

5 points: perfect agreement

Example: Professional: Visual Perception deficit impacting reading decoding
Student: Visual Perception and reading

4 points: agreement in content but not vocabulary

Example: Professional: Visual Perception deficit impacting reading decoding
Student: I have trouble seeing things straight so it's hard to read

3 points: partial or incomplete agreement

Example: Professional: Visual Perception deficit impacting reading decoding
Student: Reading problems

2 points: vague agreement

Example: Professional: Visual Perception deficit impacting reading decoding
Student: Dyslexia

1 point: no agreement

Example: Professional: Visual Perception deficit impacting reading decoding
Student: I can't write good

The five authorities' scores were averaged for each student and the ten students whose descriptions most closely resembled that of their professional diagnosis (range 3.4 to 4.6) were designated as the "high agreement group". The ten students whose descriptions were furthest from their professional diagnosis (range 1 to 2.2) were designated as the "low agreement group". When the kappa statistic was calculated to correct for chance

interrater agreements, the average kappa of .30 was considered fair agreement; the range was from poor (.14) to good agreement (.55).

These two groups, high and low agreement, were then compared on the following variables: age, grade point average, months since evaluation, Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-Revised IQ (Verbal, Performance, Full Scale), Cohen Factors (Verbal Comprehension, Perceptual Organization, Freedom From Distractibility). Additionally, the distribution of the ratings, place of diagnosis (university, community college, private psychologist, high school IEP), and the terminology used in the written description of learning disability was examined.

Results

When the scores of the five raters were averaged for all students involved in the study, the agreement between students and professionals' descriptions presented as follows:

perfect agreement	9 %
agreement in content but not vocabulary	24 %
partial or incomplete agreement	46 %
vague agreement	18 %
no agreement	3 %

It should be noted that rating scales can elicit an error of central tendency: the general tendency to avoid all extreme judgments and rate right down the middle of a scale (Kerlinger 1986). However, it was clear that the majority of respondents could not fully describe their learning disability as did the professionals.

When the ten students who most perfectly agreed with the professional diagnosis (high agreement group) were compared to the ten students who were furthest in agreement (low agreement group) using t-tests, only the variable of grade point average was significantly related to the rankings ($p = .025$). The other variables of age, months since evaluation, Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-Revised (WAIS-R) Verbal IQ, Performance IQ, Full Scale IQ, Cohen Factor Verbal Comprehension, Perceptual Organization and Freedom From Distractibility were not significantly associated with the agreement ratings.

In an attempt to determine if the venue of diagnosis influenced the student's ability to correctly verbalize the nature of their learning disability, the following data was examined:

Place of Diagnosis

	University	Community College	Psychologist in Private Practice	High School IEP
High Group	5	1	3	1
Low Group	3	1	2	4

Although the numbers are too small to be meaningful, it appeared that High School IEP as a basis for verification of learning disability presented the most difficulty for students when attempting to repeat and/or interpret the specifics of diagnosis.

The terminology used by all the students involved in the study to describe their learning disability was also examined. When analyzed separately, both the students and the professionals agreed in use of vocabulary: processing vocabulary (example: perception, memory), achievement vocabulary (example: reading, writing) or both to describe the specific learning disability. Out of 33 sets of responses, 15 used only processing vocabulary, 2 used only achievement vocabulary, and 16 used both processing and achievement to describe the learning disability

Discussion

Only one-third of the college students in this study were able to describe their own learning disability so that it would agree with the summary of their professional diagnosis. Recency of diagnosis, age, and IQ were found to be unrelated to the agreement. Only grade point average was positively associated with this ability. It would appear that students who learn the material for their classes, also learn the summary of their diagnosis.

Indications were that high school IEP information as compared to university, community college or private practice psychologists' diagnosis was the most difficult for the students to repeat. The IEP typically puts more emphasis on achievement levels but acceptable documentation of a specific learning disability should include both processing and achievement assessment information (Association of Higher Education and Disability 1996). It was found in this study that less than half of the professional diagnosis included both processing and achievement in summary statements; this is the information that students commonly use when articulating the nature of their disability.

References

Association of Higher Education and Disability (1996). Latest Developments: A Newsletter of the Learning Disabilities Special Interest Group.

Brinckerhoff, L.C. (1993). Self-advocacy: A critical skill for college students with learning disabilities. *Family & Community Health*. 16(3):23-33.

Durlak, C. M., Rose, E., & Bursuck, W.D. (1994) Preparing High School Students with Learning Disabilities for the Transition to Postsecondary Education: Teaching the Skills of Self-Determination. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*. 27(1):51-59.

Kerlinger, F.N. *Foundations of Behavioral Research*. New York, N.Y.:Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.; 1986

McGuire, J.M., Madaus, J.W., Litt, A.V., & Ramirez, M.O. (1996) An Investigation of Documentation Submitted by University Students to Verify Their Learning Disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*. 29(3):297-304.

Roffman, A. J., Herzog, J.E., Wershba-Gershon, P.M. (1994). Helping Young Adults Understand Their Learning Disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*. 27(7): 413-419.

Ryan, A.G. (1996). Transition: Preparing For Postsecondary Education and Employment. *Perspectives*. 22(4):13-16.

Satcher, J. (1994). Employment, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and Youth with Learning Disabilities. *Intervention in School and Clinic*. 29(4):208-211.



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)



REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title:

The Ability of College Students to Effectively Communicate
 The Specific Nature of Their Own Learning Disability

Author(s):

Lee H. Axelrod and Jennifer C. Zvi

Corporate Source:

Publication Date:

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic/optical media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS) or other ERIC vendors. Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following two options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be
 affixed to all Level 1 documents



Check here

For Level 1 Release:

Permitting reproduction in
 microfiche (4" x 6" film) or
 other ERIC archival media
 (e.g., electronic or optical)
 and paper copy.

The sample sticker shown below will be
 affixed to all Level 2 documents



Check here

For Level 2 Release:

Permitting reproduction in
 microfiche (4" x 6" film) or
 other ERIC archival media
 (e.g., electronic or optical),
 but *not* in paper copy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
 DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL
 HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

 Sample _____

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
 INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
 DISSEMINATE THIS
 MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER
 COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

 Sample _____

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
 INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Level 1

Level 2

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits. If permission to reproduce is granted, but neither box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

"I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic/optical media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries."

**Sign
 here→
 please**

Signature:

Lee H. Axelrod

Printed Name/Position/Title:

Lee H. Axelrod, Ph.D.
 Learning Disabilities Specialist

Organization/Address:

California State University Northridge
 18111 Nordhoff Street
 Northridge, CA 91330-8264

Telephone:

(818) 677-2684

FAX:

(818) 677-4932

E-Mail Address:

laxelrod@csun.edu

Date:

March 11, 1997

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:

Address:

Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:

Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

**ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities
and Gifted Education
The Council for Exceptional Children
1920 Association Drive
Reston, VA 20191-1589**

**Toll-Free: 800/328-0272
FAX: 703/620-2521**

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

~~ERIC Processing and Reference Facility~~

~~1100 West Street, 2d Floor
Laurel, Maryland 20707-3598~~

~~Telephone: 301-497-4080~~

~~Toll Free: 800-799-3742~~

~~FAX: 301-953-0263~~

~~e-mail: ericfac@inet.ed.gov~~

~~WWW: <http://ericfac.piccard.csc.com>~~

(Rev. 6/96)